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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR BY

SUBJECT: BURUNDI: CHANGES IN PRESIDENT'S SENIOR STAFF

REF: BUJUMBURA 025

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia Moller for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (U) Burundi's President Nkurunziza announced on May 31 changes in his two most senior staff positions. The new Chief of Cabinet, Melchior Wagara, replaces Martin Mbazumutima. The new Deputy Chief of Cabinet, Jean-Bosco Ndikumana, replaces Melchiade Nzopfabarushe, who left the position more than a month earlier to become Vice-President of Burundi's Anti-Corruption Brigade.

New Chief of Cabinet

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¶2. (SBU) New Chief of Cabinet Wagara's first position with the Government of Burundi (GOB) was with the National Social Security Institute (INSS) in 1994. He was removed from his position in 1995, upon accusations of embezzlement. Following his removal, Wagara became actively involved in the crisis gripping the country, when he "entered the bush" and joined the CNDD-FDD rebel movement.

¶3. (SBU) Wagara's most recent appointment with the GOB was as General Director of COTEBU, Burundi's government-owned textile company, after the CNDD-FDD's victory in the 2005 elections. His tenure there (2005-early 2006) was marked by a series of general strikes, where company employees accused him of corruption and embezzlement. He was eventually removed from his position by the Minister of Commerce (Madame Denise Sinankwa, currently the Minister of Finance).

New Deputy Chief of Cabinet

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¶4. (SBU) Jean-Bosco Ndikumana, the new Deputy Chief of Cabinet, most recently served in the GOB as the National Prosecutor. Ndikumana unsuccessfully prosecuted the GOB's case against seven individuals, including former President Domitien Ndayizeye and former Vice-President Alphonse Kadege, who were alleged to have threatened state security by plotting to overthrow the government (Reftel).

¶5. (C) Comment. Considering the new Chief of Cabinet's checkered background, it is unclear why the President chose him for such a high-profile, and important, position. One Burundian observer suggested that President Nkurunziza's widely noted loyalty to former compatriots from his rebel years in the bush may partially explain his choice of Wagara as new Chief of Cabinet. He commented further that the Deputy Chief of Cabinet is, however, a position where "one hasn't the authority to cause much damage." Perhaps,

as this observer suggested, Ndikumana's new position could be interpreted as a demotion, following the government's flawed coup plotter trial (Reftel), where he can "do no further harm." End Comment.

MOLLER